

Planning for Civil War Sesquicentennial Marching Along

Ball's Bluff Reenactment in 2011 Likely to be Loudoun's 'Centerpiece' Event

By [Jason Jacks](#)

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It's never too early to plan for a war. Which is why architects of advanced-planning here in Loudoun County are already busily prepping for the next big one: The 150th anniversary of the Civil War.



Ball's Bluff National Cemetery in Leesburg.

Between now and 2015, reenactments, lectures and exhibits will dot much of the South and Mid-Atlantic region of the country as hundreds of communities will be recognizing the sesquicentennial of the war that split the country in half. And with Loudoun's perch atop the former Confederacy, the county was a prime location for all sorts of action, meaning there will be plenty to commemorate locally over the next few years.

"There were a ton of events that happened in Loudoun," said Jeremy Harvey, with the Loudoun Convention and Visitors Association and a member of the Loudoun County Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Committee, which the Board of Supervisors created in 2008 to ensure Loudoun is an active participant in the anniversary events.

Recognition of the sesquicentennial officially kicked off last October with historical programs taking place in West Virginia recognizing abolitionist John Brown's failed raid on the U.S. Armory in Harpers Ferry. However, the lion's share of tributes will get under way in earnest starting in 2011.

For instance, Manassas National Battlefield will be the site of tours, demonstrations and a ceremony to feature invited speakers President Obama and Gov. Robert McDonnell on July 21, 2011, to mark the Battle of First Manassas, the initial major engagement of the war.

More locally, in October 2011, a first will happen in Loudoun: a reenactment of the pitched battle that occurred at Ball's Bluff in Leesburg that will feature as many as 1,500 people. In the 1980s, a reenactment of the Battle of Balls Bluff, the largest engagement in Loudoun, took place at Ida Lee Park, but this would be the first at the actual battle site.

"That will probably be the centerpiece of what will happen in Loudoun," said Lovettsville-resident Jim Morgan, chairman of a steering committee that is compiling a list of sesquicentennial events that will occur in the area.

The Battle of Ball's Bluff occurred on Oct. 21, 1861, when 2,000 Union troops crossed the Potomac River at Harrison Island in an attempt to capture Leesburg. Poorly coordinated, the attack was countered by about 1,600 Confederate troops, who drove the Union forces down the bluffs to the Potomac and back over the river. Casualties for the Union totaled nearly 1,000 compared to less than 200 for the Confederates, according to the National Park Service. Another 700 Union soldiers were taken prisoner.

Still in the planning phase, there is no word yet on whether reenactors will be scaling the bluffs during next year's event.

"It's a little misleading," Morgan pointed out. "It's steep, but it's not a 100-foot cliff."

Part of the day will also include a troop march from Morven Park to the battle site, which today is home to one of the United States' smallest national cemeteries.

Besides acting as a clearinghouse for event information, Loudoun's sesquicentennial committee is also working to add about a dozen more Civil War markers erected throughout Loudoun. Six are scheduled to go up this year and another six more in 2011. Grant money is paying part of the costs, with the rest provided by local communities and towns and through fundraising.

A new Web site, detailing Loudoun's Civil War milestones through articles and video, is scheduled to go live this summer.

Outside of the county's borders, the biggest sesquicentennial events will likely be those in July 2013 to commemorate the Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania, an anniversary that is expected to attract tens of thousands of visitors, some of which, according to Harvey, will stay in hotels as far away as Loudoun. Visitors attending events in Manassas next year and Antietam, Md., in 2012 will also likely be staying in local hotel rooms.

Considering the magnitude of the anniversary, most counties in Virginia have their own sesquicentennial committee, while Virginia has a sesquicentennial commission. See www.virginiacivilwar.org to learn more.

Events in April

April 1-30, Exhibit of Civil War artifacts, Thomas Balch Library, 208 West Market St., Leesburg. 703-737-7195

April 10, 2 p.m., "Tales of the Sunset Hills: A Sesquicentennial Reminiscence," Rich Gillespie of the Mosby Heritage Area Association. Sunset Hills Vineyard, 38295 Fremont Overlook Lane, Purcellville. 540-882-4560.

April 24, 1 p.m., Ball's Bluff program, Jim Morgan. Sunset Hills Vineyard, 38295 Fremont Overlook Lane, Purcellville. 540-882-4560

Loudoun's Key Civil War Milestones

May 23, 1861 – Virginia ratifies secession from United States. Loudoun residents vote 1,626 to 726 for secession.

Oct. 21, 1861 – Union and Confederate troops battle at Ball's Bluff in Leesburg.

Aug. 28, 1862 – Wounded from Second Manassas arrive at Middleburg.

Sept. 3, 1862 – Robert E. Lee arrives at Leesburg's Harrison Hall, now called Glenfiddich House.

Jan. 10, 1863 – John Mosby and nine members of First Virginia Cavalry set out from Aldie's Mt. Zion Church to begin raids on Union troops.

June 1863 – Skirmishes in Aldie, Middleburg, Ashby's Gap and Upperville